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SUBJECT: URIBE'S POPULARITY AT ALL TIME HIGH AS
EXECUTIVE-COURT SKIRMISHES CONTINUE

Classified By: Political Counselor John Creamer
Reasons 1.4 (b and d)

SUMMARY

11. (C) After the successful July 2 rescue of 15 hostages from the FARC, President Uribe's approval rating reached a record 85 percent. Seventy-four percent of Colombians approved of a third Uribe term. The Constitutional Court rejected the Supreme Court's request that it review the legality of the constitutional amendment that allowed Uribe to run for a second term in 2006--giving Uribe cover to withdraw his June 27 call for a referendum on whether to repeat the 2006 elections. President Uribe met with Supreme Court President Ricaurte on July 7 to mend fences, and new Interior and Justice Minister Valencia followed up with Ricaurte on July 10. Still, presidential advisor Jose Obdulio Gaviria and Ricaurte told us separately they expect the sparring between the executive and the Court to continue. End summary.

URIBE: 85 PERCENT APPROVAL RATING

12. (U) President Alvaro Uribe's approval rating rose to a record 85 percent, up from 76 percent, after the Colombian military's July 2 rescue of 15 hostages held by the FARC, including three Americans and Ingrid Betancourt. Three of four Colombians polled voiced support for a third term for Uribe, as opposed to 67 percent prior to the rescue. Almost 70 percent said they trusted Uribe's version of events in the Yidis Medina alleged vote-buying scandal, with only 23 percent believing the Supreme Court's finding that former Congresswoman Yidis Medina received GOC bribes in exchange for voting for the reelection amendment.

A TALE OF TWO REFERENDA: 2006 NO, 2010 MAYBE

13. (C) On July 3, the Constitutional Court denied the Supreme Court's June 26 request that it review the legality of the constitutional amendment that allowed Uribe to run for a second term in 2006. The Constitutional Court issued a statement that its original ruling approving the amendment was settled law; it would not examine the Supreme Court's request. Interior Minister Valencia told us July 9 that the Constitutional Court's ruling meant Uribe would no longer push for a referendum to repeat the 2006 presidential elections. Still, Uribe publicly said he would need to analyze the Court's decision before deciding whether to proceed with the referendum. The Supreme Court made its request in its ruling sentencing former Congresswoman Yidis Medina for her role in approving the reelection amendment.

14. (C) Senate President Nancy Patricia Gutierrez also told us the referendum idea was "dead." She said trying to move

the referendum proposal for a redo of the 2006 election through Congress would severely complicate any push to amend the Constitution to allow for a possible Uribe third term. Constitutional Court magistrate and former presidential legal advisor Mauricio Gonzalez speculated that the referendum proposal had achieved the executive's goals of pressuring the Supreme Court and laying the groundwork for a possible second reelection effort. He said that if Uribe opted to run again, he would need to make his intentions clear by September or October to allow for the time needed to obtain the required Congressional approval, Constitutional Court review, and referendum.

URIBE-SUPREME COURT SKIRMISHES CONTINUE

15. (C) The GOC is attempting to lower tensions with the Court, since its June 26 communique criticizing its integrity. Bogota Cardinal Pedro Rubiano invited President Uribe and Supreme Court President Francisco Ricaurte to meet for an informal private talk on July 7. On July 10, Minister Valencia met with Ricaurte to reestablish inter-institutional relations and lower tensions. Uribe will meet again on July 14 with Ricaurte and other members of the Court. Valencia publicly said the meetings show that executive-Supreme Court ties are returning to normal.

6 (C) Still, relations between the Supreme Court and President Uribe are unlikely to improve quickly. Presidential advisor Jose Obdulio Gaviria told us some magistrates are involved in a vague criminal conspiracy with the opposition and former paramilitaries to block a possible Uribe reelection bid. He complained that no effective body

BOGOTA 00002535 002 OF 002

exists to investigate the Court, since Supreme Court members must be investigated by the Accusations Commission in Congress. The Court has used its authority to investigate legislators to cow the Commission. Gonzalez dismissed Gaviria's claims of a Supreme Court plot against Uribe, attributing the tensions to the Supreme Court's perception that Uribe favors the Constitutional Court in its long-standing turf battle with the Supreme Court.

17. (C) Supreme Court President Ricaurte confirmed to us on July 11 that the meetings with Uribe and Valencia had gone relatively well. He predicted, however, that there is little basis for a lasting rapprochement between the Court and the executive. Ricaurte said some members of the Uribe administration, such as Jose Obdulio and Department of Administrative Security head Maria Pilar Hurtado, are conducting a "dirty tricks" campaign to intimidate the Court into dropping its investigations of Uribe-affiliated legislators for alleged paramilitary ties. He said the Court will not succumb to such pressure, adding that the Court would move against additional legislators in the near future.

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